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(54) Title: MARKET RESEARCH DATABASE HAVING HISTORICAL CONTROL DESIGNATOR (57) Abstract A market research database contains a plurality of sets of product related information. Each set of product related information relates to a corresponding market aspect of products. For example, a set may relate to packages in which products are contained, another set may relate to brand names of products, still another set may relate to business enterprises which package, distribute, or market products, and so on. Each set includes a current layer of product related information, wherein the current layer of product related information is in current time. The product related information in the current layer of each set of product related information includes a control designator. The control designator permits direct access to the current layer of product related information substantially exclusive of other product related information.		

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MARKET RESEARCH DATABASE HAVING
HISTORICAL CONTROL DESIGNATOR

Technical Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to a market research database having historical control designators in order to make a layer of information, current in time, more easily accessible.

Background of the Invention

10 Information data models are used by database designers to model various environments. For example, information data models are used to model business environments in order to assure, *inter alia*, operational efficiency. The computer systems involved in modeling such an environment typically require complex computer-level manipulations, because the environment that is being modeled consists of many complex and interrelated objects. Such information systems exploit database management technology in order to promote efficient design, to enhance file maintenance and modification, to eliminate data file redundancy, and to provide substantial documentation regarding data file structure.

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The implementation of an information management system utilizing database management technology typically involves the concept of at least dual data representations, i.e., logical representation and physical representation. A logical representation relates to the form in which data records are presented to, and interact with, the system user. A physical representation relates to the form in which individual data records are stored, and how the records are manipulated by the computer system. The physical representation of the data in the past has been regarded as of little or no concern to the end user because the task of manipulating data storage areas is a function of the system, and is established by system designers.

Disregard of the relationship between the physical representation of data and the end user has lead to databases which are difficult for the end user to use and manipulate. For example, market research databases are used to track the flow of products through one or more business enterprises and ultimately to an end user, such as a consumer. Such a database may be useful in determining the effective use of shelf space within a retailer, the effective use of advertising and other promotional campaigns, the effectiveness of distribution systems, the buying habits of consumers, retailers, wholesalers, and the like, and other

information which can make manufacturers and distributors of products more efficient and profitable.

Databases which are used for market research and analysis contain information typically stored in flat files headed by uniform product codes (UPCs). Storing market research data in flat files headed by uniform product codes, however, has several problems. For example, uniform product codes are typically recycled so that a uniform product code that describes a particular product in one year may describe a different product in a later year. While the users of these uniform product codes are generally asked to wait a full year before a uniform product code is recycled, uniform product codes are frequently recycled within a year. Therefore, uniform product codes may overlap different products in terms of product related information that is stored in a market research database.

That is, when a product is discontinued, its associated uniform product code is discontinued for some period of time. After this period of time, the discontinued uniform product code may be recycled by associating it with a newly introduced product. However, it may be necessary to store information about both the discontinued product and the newly introduced product in a market research database because both products may still be in distribution (e.g.,

the discontinued product may still be on store shelves). Moreover, even after the discontinued product and the newly introduced product are no longer in distribution at the same time, distributors and others may want product related information about both. However, storing information about a discontinued product and a newly introduced product, where both are associated with the same uniform product code, presents difficult problems to the database user and/or designer.

Moreover, product related information storage needs frequently change. For example, changing needs often require the deletion or addition of fields. While the deletion of fields in flat data files of a market research database is not particularly difficult to implement, the deletion of fields in such flat data files can lead to an inefficient use of memory. Addition of fields in such a market research database, however, is very difficult to implement without changing the software that implements the database.

Also, it is often desirable to track and report the evolution of a product, a brand name, a business enterprise, and/or the like. Therefore, while many database systems store data in historical perspective, tracking the evolution of a product, a brand name, a business enterprise,

and/or the like is difficult because of the way in which the data is stored. For example, it is known to use an additional code in connection with a uniform product code in order to identify the generation of a product. However, while this additional code may indicate that some aspect of a product has changed, it does little to designate the particular aspect of the product that has changed. To determine the changed aspect, the data stored in connection with the additional code must be closely examined and compared to data associated with other generations of the same uniform product code in order to determine the changed aspect.

Furthermore, whatever the form of the market research database, it is often desirable to efficiently access a particular time layer of information in a market research database. For example, the current time layer of information in a database stores product related information in the database that is currently in effect for a product, a business enterprise, and/or the like. Generation codes and effective dates are not as useful in accessing a time layer of information as is desirable because multiple bits of information must be read in order to determine an item of product related information in the current time layer. Thus, when product related information is to be accessed for

a particular layer in time across the entire database, the reading of the necessary bits related to all relevant items of conformation requires investment of a substantial amount of time.

5 The present invention is directed to a marketing research database which solves one or more of the problems discussed above.

Summary of the Invention

10 In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, a market research database comprises current and previous information. The current information relates to a market aspect of products, the current information is current in time, and the current information includes a first historical control designator identifying the current information as being current in time. The previous information
15 relates to the market aspect of products, the previous information is previous in time to the current information, and the previous information includes a second historical control designator identifying the previous information as being previous in time to the current information. One of the first and second historical control designators is unique.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a market research database comprises a layer of product information related to a market aspect of a product, and other product information related to the market aspect of a product. The layer of product information includes effective date information for the layer of product information, an identification code for the layer of product information, and a first control designator associated with the layer of product information. The other product information are in layers substantially exclusive of the layer of product information, and the other information include effective date information for the other product information, identification codes for the other product information, and second control designators associated with the other product information. The first control designator permits access to the layer of product information substantially exclusively of the other product information.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention, a market research database comprises a plurality of sets of product related information. Each set of product related information includes a current layer of product related information. The current layer of product related information is in current time, and other product related information in each set of product related informa-

tion is previous in time to the current layer of product related information. The product related information in each set of product related information includes (i) identification codes for corresponding product related information, and (ii) control designators. A control designator for the current layer of each of the plurality of sets of product related information is arranged to permit direct access to the current layer of product related information.

Brief Description of the Drawings

These and other features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from a detailed consideration of the invention when taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary data processing system in which the market research database of the present invention may be used;

Figure 2 is a block diagram of a market research database which is arranged in accordance with the present invention and which includes product definition information, product characteristic information, package information, package characteristic information, naked product information, naked product characteristic information, brand name information, business enterprise information, charac-

teristic value/type information, characteristic type information, and characteristic value information;

Figure 3 illustrates a table containing the product definition information of Figure 2;

5 Figure 4 illustrates a table containing the product characteristic information of Figure 2;

Figure 5 illustrates a table containing the package information of Figure 2;

10 Figure 6 illustrates a table containing the package characteristic information of Figure 2;

Figure 7 illustrates a table containing the naked product information of Figure 2;

Figure 8 illustrates a table containing the naked product characteristic information of Figure 2;

15 Figure 9 illustrates a table containing the brand name information of Figure 2;

Figure 10 illustrates a table containing the business enterprise information of Figure 2;

20 Figure 11 illustrates a table containing the characteristic value/type information of Figure 2;

Figure 12 illustrates a table containing the characteristic type information of Figure 2;

Figure 13 illustrates a table containing the characteristic value information of Figure 2; and,

Figure 14 illustrates an example useful in understanding historical control designators (HIST CTL) that are used in the above tables and that permit access to any particular layer in time of the information stored in the market research database.

Detailed Description

As shown in Figure 1, a data processing system 10 provides an exemplary environment for the market research database of the present invention and includes a central repository 12. The central repository 12 stores a market research database 14 which will be described in more detail below. A work station 16, operating through a gateway 18, is used for entering market research data into the market research database 14 and for reading market research information out of the market research database 14. Additional work stations may also be provided for these purposes. The work station 16 may be provided with a display in order to present the user of the data processing system 10 with various screen displays formatted for ease of data entry, data manipulation, and report generation. The work station 16 may further have a keyboard, a bar code scanner for scanning industry codes such as uniform product codes, an optical character recognition device, and/or the like.

Moreover, personal computers may be provided in order to collect data about products in the field. One such personal computer 20 is shown in Figure 1. The personal computer 20 downloads its collected data to the central repository 12 through a server 22 under control of the work station 16. For example, the personal computer 20 can be used to collect market research data from various retail, wholesale, and/or other product outlet establishments regarding new products that have just become available.

Market research data may be stored in the market research database 14 in the form of tables which store groups of similar data. However, it should be understood that the market research data may be organized other than by tables. Accordingly, the organization of data in the market research database 14 may be generically referred to herein as information sets.

As shown in Figure 2, the market research database 14 includes various information which relates to various market aspects of products. For example, the market research database 14 includes a product definition table 30, a uniform product code table 32, a naked product table 34, a package definition table 36, a brand name table 38, a business enterprise table 40, a product characteristic role table 42, a characteristic value/type table 44, a character-

istic type table 46, a characteristic value/type table 48, a package characteristic role table 50, and a naked product characteristic role table 52. Although the product characteristic role table 42, the package characteristic role table 50, and the naked product characteristic role table 52 are shown as tables containing certain information as discussed below, it should be understood that this information is role information and instead may be scattered throughout other tables of the market research database 14.

The product definition table 30 stores product definition codes which, like uniform product codes, are used to designate corresponding products that are defined according to links also stored in the product definition table 30 of the market research database 14. These product definition codes function to divorce products and their product related information from the products' uniform product codes. Accordingly, a product definition code is permanently assigned to the product and is used throughout the market research database 14, where appropriate, to designate the product and to provide a link to the information about the product stored in other tables of the market research database 14. A product definition code is assigned to a product the first time that any information about the prod-

uct is stored in the market research database 14, and is not recycled as are uniform product codes.

However, in order to facilitate the entry of data into the market research database 14, the product definition code stored in the product definition table 30 is linked, where applicable, to a corresponding uniform product code which is stored in the uniform product code table 32. Thus, for example, if a new product is introduced into the market and has been assigned a new uniform product code, that new uniform product code can be scanned by the personal computer 20 and relevant information about the product as contained in that new uniform product code can be populated into the relevant tables of the market research database 14 (for example, under control of a set of rules). Additional product related information can be manually entered.

However, if a uniform product code is recycled, the old product formerly associated with it can remain in the market research database 14 under its original product definition code, and a new product definition code is assigned to the new product that is designated by the recycled uniform product code. Thus, the old link between the product definition code for the old product and the uniform product code is moved to a historical layer, and a new link between the new product definition code and the recycled

uniform product code is established in a current layer. As a result, information about the old and new products may be maintained in the market research database 14 at the same time in a simple and non-confusing manner. Moreover, because products, and information about the products, have been divorced from their corresponding uniform product codes, recycling of uniform product codes does not require substantial changes to the information stored in the market research database 14.

As product related information is entered into the market research database 14, this product related information can be viewed on the display of the work station 16 so that any erroneous information may be corrected and so that additional information may be entered.

The product definition table 30 links the product definition codes stored therein with product related information which defines the products designated by the product definition codes and which is stored in other tables. For example, the naked product table 34 contains information about naked products. A naked product is somewhat like the product within a product. That is, most of us think of a product as the combination of a package and a substance contained within the package. The substance, absent its package, is referred to herein as a naked product.

For example, the naked product table 34 might contain cola as an item of information, whereas the product definition table 30 has links between cola, as stored in the naked product table 34, and other product related information such as a package, a size, and the like, stored in other tables. Put together, the naked product, and the other information, linked to a product definition code of the product definition table 30 define a product as is commonly understood by the consumer.

Thus, the product definition table 30 is also linked to the package definition table 36 which contains definitions of various packages which are currently used to enclose naked products in order to form products. The naked product table 34 has links to the brand name table 38 which contains brand names of products. Because several naked products may have a brand name associated with them, each brand name stored in the brand name table 38 may be linked to multiple naked products stored in the naked product table 34. The brand name table 38 is linked to the business enterprise table 40. Each business enterprise stored in the business enterprise table 40 may be associated with plural brand names stored in the brand name table 38. For example, the business enterprise table 40 may contain business enter-

prises which package, wholesale, or retail a brand name, and so on.

5 The product definition table 30 is linked to a product characteristic role table 42. The primary function of the product characteristic role table 42 is to link product definition codes stored in the product definition table 30 to various characteristic types and values. Accordingly, the product characteristic role table 42 links the product definition table 30 to a characteristic value
10 table 44, and the characteristic value table 44 contains links to the characteristic type table 46 and the characteristic value/type table 48. Thus, a definition of a product is partially completed by the characteristic types of the characteristic type table 46 to which the product is linked
15 and by the characteristic values of the characteristic value/type table 48 to which the product is also linked.

 The characteristic type table 46 contains characteristic type information such as flavor, size, color, and the like. The characteristic value/type table 48 contains
20 values of the characteristic types stored in the characteristic type table 46. For example, the characteristic value/type table 48 may store grape, orange, cherry, and the like as values of the type "flavor" stored in the characteristic type table 46, 12 ounces, 5 pounds, 1 liter, and the

like as values of the type "size" stored in the characteristic type table 46, and red, green, blue, and the like as values of the type "color" stored in the characteristic type table 46.

5 Similarly, the package characteristic role table
50 links package codes stored in the package definition
table 36 to characteristic value/type codes stored in the
characteristic value table 44 (package codes are also linked
to product definition codes in the product definition table
10 30). The primary function of the package characteristic
role table 50 is to link package codes stored in the package
definition table 36 to various characteristic types and
values. Accordingly, the package characteristic role table
50 links the package definition table 36 to the characteris-
15 tic value table 44, and the characteristic value table 44
contains links to the characteristic type table 46 and the
characteristic value/type table 48. Thus, a definition of a
package is completed by the characteristic types of the
characteristic type table 46 to which the package is linked,
20 and by the characteristic values of the characteristic
value/type table 48 to which the package is also linked.
For example, a package may be defined in terms of character-
istic types such as aluminum can, cardboard box, and the

like, and in terms of characteristic values such as the size of the container.

The naked product characteristic role table 52 links naked product codes stored in the naked product table 34 to characteristic value/type codes stored in the characteristic value table 44. In turn, the characteristic value table 44 contains links to the characteristic type table 46 and the characteristic value/type table 48. Thus, the naked product characteristic role table 52 links naked product codes stored in the naked product table 34 to characteristic value/type codes stored in the characteristic value table 44, and the characteristic value/type codes stored in the characteristic value table 44 are linked to characteristic types stored in the characteristic type table 46 and to characteristic values stored in the characteristic value/type table 48. Thus, the naked product cola may be defined in terms of a characteristic type such as its color and in terms of certain characteristic values such as brown.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the market research database 14 is a database in third normal form as opposed to, for example, flat data files of current market research databases. Thus, instead of a flat file consisting of a string of information including a uniform product code, a package, brand names, business enterprises, and the like,

the market research database 14 is broken up into various information tables each containing similar product related information sets and each containing links to product related information contained in other information sets. The definition of a product is created in the product definition table 30 by providing the beginning links which, in combination with the links in other information tables, define each particular product.

The third normal form of the market research database 14 makes the addition of information much easier than if the market research database 14 were stored as flat data files. In essence, each of the tables 30-56 shown in Figure 2 is depthless in the sense that information can be added to each of these information tables without defining new fields and the like inherent with flat data files. Moreover, although particular tables 30-56 have been described in connection with the market research database 14, it should be understood that the market research database 14 may include different, fewer, or more tables than those specifically shown in Figure 2. Furthermore, each of the tables 30-56 shown in Figure 2 may be combined with others of the shown tables or may be separated into additional sub-tables. However, it should be noted that combining the tables 30-56 tends to cause the market research database 14

to retreat from its third normal form, making the market research database 14 more difficult to use.

The product definition table 30 is shown in more detail in Figure 3. The product definition table 30 includes a product definition code column 60 in which are stored the product definition codes of the various products contained within the market research database 14. The product definition codes, as well as any of the other codes discussed herein, may be any combination of alphabetical, numeric, and/or other symbols. For each product definition code stored in the product definition code column 60, a historical control designator is stored in a historical control column 62. In essence, the historical control designators stored in the historical control column 62 define time layers of product related information. The historical control designator indicating the current time layer of information in the market research database 14 may be referred to herein as the current historical control designator. This current time layer provides the definitions of products currently in effect. Those historical control designators, which designate layers of information in the market research database 14 prior to the current time layer of information, may be referred to as previous historical control designators. Thus, a product definition code

stored in the product definition code column 60 may have several entries in the product definition code column 60, with each such entry having a different historical control designator. One such entry may relate to one definition of a product, another such entry may relate to another definition of the product, and so on. Accordingly, a product may be tracked as its brand name, package, uniform product code, related business enterprises, and/or the like changes.

A current historical control designator, such as zero, may be assigned to the current time layer of the product definition information stored in the product definition table 30. This current time layer for the product definition table 30 provides the definitions of products currently in effect. If a user wishes to determine the current definition of one or more products, the user may use the current historical control designator in order to extract information from the market research database 14 which defines such product or products at the current time period.

Moreover, the historical control designator assigned to the current time layer of information stored in each of the other tables of the market research database 14 may be identical to the historical control designator assigned to the current time layer information stored in the product definition table 30 so that the current time layer

of information across the entire market research database 14
may be easily determined.

Each product definition code as stored in the
product definition table 30 also has associated therewith a
5 historical counter control stored in a historical counter
control column 64 (which designates the number of historical
layers in the relevant table), a product name stored in a
product name column 66, a package code stored in a package
code column 68, a naked product code stored in a naked
10 product column 70, a uniform product code stored in a uni-
form product code column 72, and an effective date stored in
an effective date column 74. The product definition table
30 may include different information, or other information,
such as an end date on which a particular product definition
15 code and its associated product name, package code, and/or
the like was ended, a product description, which is a text
description of a particular product, and the like.

The product names stored in the product name
column 66 may be different from the brand names of the prod-
20 ucts, and may instead be short titles which are intended to
be at least somewhat descriptive of the products defined in
the product definition table 30. The package codes stored
in the package code column 68 provide links between the
product definition codes stored in the product definition

code column 60 of the product definition table 30 and package codes stored in the package definition table 36 of the market research database 14. The naked product codes stored in the naked product column 70 link the product definition codes stored in the product definition code column 60 of the product definition table 30 with naked product codes stored in the naked product table 34. The uniform product codes stored in the uniform product column 72 link the product definition codes stored in the product definition code column 60 with uniform product codes stored in the uniform product code table 32.

The effective dates stored in the effective date column 74 are used to indicate the effective dates of corresponding combinations of product definition codes stored in the product definition code column 60, historical control designators stored in the historical control column 62, historical counter control designators stored in the historical counter control column 64, product names stored in the product name column 66, package codes stored in the package code column 68, naked product codes stored in the naked product column 70, and uniform product codes stored in the uniform product code column 72. Thus, the dates on which product definition codes are defined or redefined in terms of their product names, their packages, their naked prod-

ucts, their uniform product codes, and/or the like may be determined from the effective date column 74.

5 The product characteristic role table 42 is shown in more detail in Figure 4 and includes a product definition code column 80 which links a particular product definition stored in the product definition table 30 as designated by its product definition code with a characteristic type code stored in a characteristic type code column 82, a characteristic value code stored in a characteristic value code
10 column 84, a historical control designator stored in a historical control designator column 86, and the like. Thus, as discussed above, the product characteristic role table 42 links products as defined in the product definition table 30 to characteristic value/type codes stored in the
15 characteristic value table 44.

 The historical control column 86 stores historical control designators which permit the evolution of product characteristics associated with particular products to be easily tracked. As in the case of the historical control
20 designators stored in the product definition table 30, the historical control designators stored in the historical control designator column 86 may include a unique current historical control designator (such as zero) to designate

the current time layer of information stored in the product characteristic role table 42.

5 The package definition table 36 is shown in more detail in Figure 5. The package definition table 36 includes a package code column 90 in which package codes associated with various packages may be stored. For each package code stored in the package code column 90, a package name is stored in a package name column 92, a historical control designator is stored in a historical control column 10 94, a historical counter control designator is stored in a historical counter control column 96, an effective date is stored in an effective date column 98, an end date is stored in an end date column 100, and a package description is stored in a package description column 102. The package definition table 36 may include different or other information as well.

20 The package names stored in the package name column 92 may be short titles which are intended to be at least somewhat descriptive of the packages defined in the package definition table 36. As in the case of the historical control designators stored in other tables, the historical control designators stored in the historical control column 94 define time layers in the package definition table 36. Thus, a package code may have several entries in the

package code column 90 with each such entry having a different historical control designator. One such entry may relate to one definition of a package, another such entry may relate to another definition of the package, and so on.

5 A unique current time layer historical control designator, such a zero, may be assigned to the current time layer of the package definition information stored in the package definition table 36.

10 The package codes stored in the package code column 90 of the package definition table 36 and package codes stored in the package code column 68 of the product definition table 30 act as links between the product definitions stored in the product definition table 30 and package definitions stored in the package definition table 36 of the

15 market research database 14. The effective dates stored in the effective date column 98 are used to indicate the effective dates of corresponding combinations of package codes stored in the package code column 90, package names stored in the package name column 92, historical control designat-

20 ors stored in the historical control column 94, historical counter control designators stored in the historical counter control column 96, and the like. Thus, the dates on which package codes are defined or redefined in terms of their

package names and/or the like may be determined from the effective date column 98.

Because a particular package may evolve through time, there may be several entries in the package definition table 36 headed by the same package code in the package code column 90. The current definition of a package can be determined from the unique current historical control designator stored in the historical control designator column 94. The effective date of a package definition may be determined from the effective date column 98, the end date of a particular package definition may be determined from the end date column 100, and a description of a package definition may be determined from the package description column 102.

The package characteristic role table 50 is shown in more detail in Figure 6 and includes a package code column 110 which provide links between package definitions stored in the package definition table 36 and characteristic type codes stored in a characteristic type code column 112, characteristic value codes stored in a characteristic value code column 114, historical control designators stored in a historical control designator column 116, and the like. Thus, the package characteristic role table 50 links package definitions associated with package codes stored in the package definition table 36 to characteristic value/type

codes stored in the characteristic value table 44. The historical control column 116 stores historical control designators which permit the evolution of package characteristics associated with particular packages to be easily tracked. As in the case of the historical control designators stored in other tables, the historical control designators stored in the historical control designator column 116 may include a unique current historical control designator (such as zero) to designate the current time layer of information stored in the package characteristic role table 50.

The naked product table 34 is shown in more detail in Figure 7. The naked product table 34 includes a naked product code column 120 in which naked product codes associated with various naked products may be stored. For each naked product code stored in the naked product code column 120, a historical control designator is stored in a historical control column 122, a historical counter control designator is stored in a historical counter control column 124, a naked product name is stored in a naked product name column 126, a brand name code is stored in a brand name code column 128, and an effective date is stored in an effective date column 130. As in the case of the other tables of the market research database 14, the naked product table 34 may include other columns such as a naked product description

column for providing a description of each of the naked products stored in the naked product table 34.

As in the case of historical control designators stored in other tables, the historical control designators stored in the historical control column 122 define time layers in the naked product table 34. Thus, a naked product code may have several entries in the naked product code column 120 with each such entry having a different historical control designator. One such entry may relate to one definition of a naked product, another such entry may relate to another definition of the naked product, and so on. A unique current time layer historical control designator, such a zero, may be assigned to the current time layer of the naked product information stored in the naked product table 34. The naked product names stored in the naked product name column 126 may be short titles which are intended to be at least somewhat descriptive of the naked products defined in the naked product table 34.

The naked product codes stored in the naked product code column 120 of the naked product table 34 and the naked product codes stored in the naked product code column 70 of the product definition table 30 link the product definitions of the product definition table 30 and the naked products stored in the naked product table 34 of the market

research database 14. The effective dates stored in the effective date column 130 are used to indicate the effective dates of corresponding combinations of naked product codes stored in the naked product code column 120, historical control designators stored in the historical control column 122, historical counter control designators stored in the historical counter control column 124, naked product names stored in the naked product name column 126, brand names stored in the brand name column 128, and the like. Thus, the date on which a naked product code is defined or redefined in terms of its naked product name, brand name, and/or the like may be determined from the effective date column 130.

As shown in Figures 2, 3, and 7, each product as defined in the product definition table 30 may be linked to a brand name stored in the brand name table 38 through the naked product table 34. Thus, a brand name may be linked to a product definition stored in the product definition table 30 by its brand name code stored in both the naked product table 34 and the brand name table 38 and by corresponding naked product codes stored in both the product definition table 30 and the naked product table 34. It should be understood, however, that brand names may be linked to product definitions stored in the product definition table

30 by other mechanisms, such as a brand name column added to the product definition table 30. However, as discussed above, such a combination of tables retreats from the third normal form of the market research database 14.

5 The naked product characteristic role table 52 is shown in more detail in Figure 8 and includes a naked product code column 140 which links a particular naked product stored in the naked product table 34 with a characteristic type code stored in a characteristic type code column 142,
10 and a characteristic value code stored in a characteristic value code column 144. Thus, the naked product characteristic role table 52 links naked products stored in the naked product table 34 to characteristic value/type codes stored in the characteristic value table 44. The naked product
15 characteristic role table 52 may include other columns, in addition to those shown in Figure 8, such as a historical control column which may include a unique current historical control designator to designate the current time layer of information stored in the naked product characteristic role
20 table 52.

 The brand name table 38 is shown in more detail in Figure 9. The brand name table 38 includes a brand name code column 150 in which brand name codes associated with various brand names may be stored. For each brand name code

stored in the brand name code column 150, a brand name is stored in a brand name column 152, a business enterprise code is stored in a business enterprise code column 154, a historical control designator is stored in a historical control column 156, a historical counter control designator is stored in a historical counter control column 158, and an effective date is stored in an effective date column 160. As in the case of the other tables of the market research database 14, the brand name table 38 may include different or other columns containing different or other information.

As in the case of historical control designators stored in other tables, the historical control designators stored in the historical control column 156 define time layers in the brand name table 38, and the evolution of a brand name as stored in the brand name table 38 may be followed through the use of the historical control designators stored in the historical control column 156 and/or the effective dates stored in the effective date column 160.

Thus, a brand name code may have several entries in the brand name code column 150, with each such entry having a different historical control designator. A unique current time layer historical control designator, such a zero, may be assigned to the current time layer of the brand name information stored in the brand name table 38. The brand

names stored in the brand name column 126 are actual brand names and are identified by the brand name codes in the brand name table 34.

5 The brand name codes stored in the brand name code column 150 of the brand name table 38 match brand name codes stored in the business enterprise table 40 in order to link business enterprises of the business enterprises table 40 with brand names stored in the brand name table 38 of the market research database 14. The effective dates stored in
10 the effective date column 160 are used to indicate the effective dates of corresponding combinations of brand name codes stored in the brand name code column 150, brand names stored in the brand name column 152, business enterprise names stored in the business enterprise name column 154,
15 historical control designators stored in the historical control column 156, and historical counter control designators stored in the historical counter control column 158, and the like. Thus, the dates on which a brand name code is defined and/or redefined in terms of its brand name, busi-
20 ness enterprise, and/or the like may be determined from the effective date column 160.

As shown in Figures 2, 3, 7, and 9, each product as defined in the product definition table 30 may be linked to a business enterprise name stored in the business enter-

prise table 40 through the naked product table 34 and the brand name table 38. It should be understood, however, that business enterprise names may be linked to product definitions stored in the product definition table 30 by other mechanisms, such as a business enterprise name column added to the product definition table 30.

The business enterprise table 40 is shown in more detail in Figure 10. The business enterprise table 40 includes a business enterprise code column 170 in which business enterprise codes associated with various business enterprises may be stored. For each business enterprise code stored in the business enterprise code column 170, a business enterprise name is stored in a business enterprise name column 172, a historical control designator is stored in a historical control column 174, a historical counter control designator is stored in a historical counter control column 176, and an effective date is stored in an effective date column 178. The business enterprise table 38 may include different or other columns containing different or other information.

As in the case of historical control designators stored in other tables, the historical control designators stored in the historical control column 174 define time layers in the business enterprise table 40, and the evolu-

tion of a business enterprise as stored in the business enterprise table 40 may be followed through the use of the historical control designators stored in the historical control column 174 and/or the effective dates stored in the effective date column 178. Thus, a business enterprise code may have several entries in the business enterprise code column 170, with each such entry having a different historical control designator. A unique current time layer historical control designator, such a zero, may be assigned to the current time layer of the business enterprise information stored in the business enterprise table 40. The business enterprise names stored in the business enterprise name column 172 are actual business enterprise names and are identified by the business enterprise codes in the business enterprise table 40.

The effective dates stored in the effective date column 178 are used to indicate the effective dates of corresponding combinations of business enterprise codes stored in the business enterprise code column 170, business enterprise names stored in the business enterprise name column 172, historical control designators stored in the historical control column 174, historical counter control designators stored in the historical counter control column 176, and the like. Thus, the dates on which a business

enterprise code is defined and/or redefined in terms of its business enterprise name and/or the like may be determined from the effective date column 178.

5 The characteristic value table 44 is shown in more detail in Figure 11. The characteristic value table 44 includes characteristic type codes stored in a characteristic type code column 180, characteristic value codes stored in a characteristic value code column 182, historical control designators stored in a historical control column 184, 10 historical counter control designators stored in a historical counter control column 186, and effective dates stored in an effective date column 188. The characteristic value table 44 may include different or other columns containing different or other information.

15 Accordingly, the characteristic type codes and the characteristic value codes stored in the characteristic value table 44 link the product definition codes stored in the product characteristic role table 42, the naked product codes stored in the naked product characteristic role table 20 52, and the package codes stored in the package characteristic role table 50 with characteristic types and characteristic values stored in the characteristic type table 46 and the characteristic value/type table 48.

The evolution of characteristic value/type codes may be tracked through the historical control designators stored in the historical control designator column 184 and/or the effective dates stored in the effective date column 188. As in the case of the other tables of the market research database 14, the unique current time layer historical control designator, such a zero, indicates the current time layer of characteristics type codes and characteristic value codes stored in the characteristic value table 44.

The characteristic type table 46 is shown in more detail in Figure 12. The characteristic type table 46 includes characteristic type codes stored in a characteristic type code column 190, characteristic type names stored in a characteristic type name column 192, historical control designators stored in a historical control column 194, historical counter control designators stored in a historical counter control column 196, and effective dates stored in an effective date column 198. The characteristic type table 46 may include different or other columns containing different or other information.

Accordingly, each characteristic type name, such as flavor, size, color, and the like, as stored in the characteristic type name column 192, is associated with a

characteristic type code stored in the characteristic type column 190, and with historical control designators stored in the historical control column 194, historical counter control designators stored in the historical counter control column 196, and effective dates stored in the effective date column 198. The characteristic type codes provide the links between these characteristic type names and the product definitions stored in the product definition table 30, the package definitions stored in the package definition table 36, and the naked products stored in the naked product table 34.

The characteristic value/type table 48 is shown in more detail in Figure 13. The characteristic value/type table 48 includes characteristic value codes stored in a characteristic value code column 200, characteristic values stored in a characteristic value column 202, historical control designators stored in a historical control column 204, historical counter control designators stored in a historical counter control column 206, and effective dates stored in an effective date column 208. The characteristic value/type table 48 may include different or other columns containing different or other information.

Accordingly, each characteristic value, such as 12 ounces, 5 pounds, 1 liter, and the like, as stored in the

characteristic value column 202, is associated with a characteristic value code stored in the characteristic value column 200 and with historical control designators stored in the historical control column 204, historical counter control designators stored in the historical counter control column 206, and effective dates stored in the effective date column 208. The characteristic value codes provide the links between these characteristic values and the product definitions stored in the product definition table 30, the package definitions stored in the package definition table 36, and the naked products stored in the naked product table 34.

The usefulness of historical control designators and/or effective dates may be understood in connection with Figure 14. As shown in Figure 14, a brand name table 210 includes a brand name code column 212 for storing brand name codes, a brand name column 214 for storing brand names associated with the brand name codes, a historical control column 216 for storing historical control designators associated with the brand name codes, a historical counter control column 218 for storing historical counter control designators, an effective date column 220 for storing effective dates associated with the brand name codes, and/or the like. In the example of Figure 14, one brand name code

having a value of 1 has associated with it three different brand names. Thus, over the life of a particular product contained in the product definition table 30, the product had three different brand names. The current brand name, which was put into effect on 1/1/97 is ABC. The current brand name is associated with a historical control designator having a value of zero indicating that the current brand name ABC is at the current time layer of the information stored in the brand name table 210. Prior to the brand name ABC, the product had the brand name A BC which was put into effect on 1/1/96 and which was stopped being used on 1/1/97. The historical control designator for A BC has a value of 1 indicating that the brand name A BC was in a layer of information prior to the current time layer of information in the brand name table 210. Furthermore, prior to the use of the brand name A BC, the product was associated with the brand name AB C and has a historical control designator having a value of 2 associated therewith. This brand name AB C was put into effect on 1/1/95 and was stopped being used on 1/1/96.

A second brand name (i.e., DEF) associated with a second brand name code, having a value of 2, is shown in the brand name table 210. This brand name was put into effect on 4/1/97 and has a historical control designator having a

value of zero indicating that this brand name is at the current time layer of information in the brand name table 210.

5 The use of the historical control designators in the historical control column 216 as shown in Figure 14 is similar to the use of the historical control designators in the historical control columns of other tables in the market research database 14. If a user desires a report which includes information in the current time layer of information of the market research database 14, the user looks for all relevant information having a historical control designator of zero. While the historical control designator of zero is used to indicate the current time layer of information in the market research database 14, the designator which is used as the historical control designator for the current time layer of information may have any other symbol or symbol sequence, value or value sequence, number or number sequence, alphabetical character or alphabetical sequence, or alphanumeric character or alphanumeric sequence.

10

15

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 The package codes stored in the package definition table 36 and in the product definition table 30, and the characteristic type codes and characteristic value codes stored in the package characteristic role table 50 and the

characteristic value table 44, are the links to the characteristic types and characteristic values stored in the characteristic type table 46 and the characteristic value/type table 48 which define a package that, in turn, help to define a product of the product definition table 30.

Similarly, the naked product codes stored in the naked product table 34 and in the product definition table 30, and the characteristic type codes and characteristic value codes stored in the naked product characteristic role table 52 and the characteristic value table 44, are the links to the characteristic types and characteristic values stored in the characteristic type table 46 and the characteristic value/type table 48 which define a naked product that, in turn, also helps to define a product of the product definition table 30.

Moreover, the naked product codes stored in the naked product table 34 and in the product definition table 30, and the brand name codes stored in the naked product 34 and the brand name table 38, are the links to the brand names stored in the brand name table 38 that further help to define a product of the product definition table 30.

Additionally, the naked product codes stored in the naked product table 34 and in the product definition table 30, the brand name codes stored in the naked product

34 and the brand name table 38, and the business enterprise codes stored in the brand name table 38 and the business enterprise table 40, are the links to the business enterprises stored in the business enterprise role table 50 that
5 move the products of the product definition table 30 through their distribution chains.

Certain modifications of the present invention have been discussed above. Other modifications will occur to those practicing in the art of the present invention.
10 For example, while the present invention has been described above in relation to uniform product codes, a uniform product is only one example of the type of industry code that may be used in connection with the present invention. Therefore, it should be understood that the present inven-
15 tion is useful in connection with any type of industry code.

Also, Figure 1 illustrates the data processing system 10 as an exemplary data processing system which may be used to store and access market research data in the market research database 14. However, it should be under-
20 stood that other data processing systems may be used to store and access market research data in the market research database 14.

Furthermore, a code, such as used herein in connection with product definition codes, naked product codes,

brand name codes, business enterprise codes, package codes,
characteristic value/type codes, characteristic type codes,
and characteristic value codes, can be any alphabetical,
numeric, alphanumeric, or other symbol or set of symbols or
ID.

Accordingly, the description of the present inven-
tion is to be construed as illustrative only and is for the
purpose of teaching those skilled in the art the best mode
of carrying out the invention. The details may be varied
substantially without departing from the spirit of the
invention, and the exclusive use of all modifications which
are within the scope of the appended claims is reserved.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A market research database comprising:
2 current information related to a market aspect of
3 products, wherein the current information is current in
4 time, and wherein the current information includes a first
5 historical control designator identifying the current infor-
6 mation as being current in time; and,
7 previous information related to the market aspect
8 of products, wherein the previous information is previous in
9 time to the current information, and wherein the previous
10 information includes a second historical control designator
11 identifying the previous information as being previous in
12 time to the current information;
13 wherein one of the first and second historical
control designators is unique.

1 2. The market research database of claim 1 where-
2 in the first historical control designator is unique so that
3 the current information is accessible through the first his-
torical control designator.

1 3. The market research database of claim 1 where-
2 in the current information includes a redefine date on which
 the current information came into current effectiveness.

1 4. The market research database of claim 1 where-
 in the first historical control designator is zero.

1 5. The market research database of claim 1 where-
2 in the market aspect of products is naked product informa-
 tion.

1 6. The market research database of claim 5 where-
2 in the current and previous information include naked prod-
3 uct codes and historical control designators for correspond-
 ing naked product codes.

1 7. The market research database of claim 5 where-
2 in the current and previous information include links to
 other information.

1 8. The market research database of claim 7 where-
2 in the other information includes naked product characteris-
 tics.

1 9. The market research database of claim 7 where-
in the other information includes brand name information.

1 10. The market research database of claim 9
2 wherein the brand name information includes links to busi-
ness enterprise information.

1 11. The market research database of claim 1
2 wherein the market aspect of products is brand name informa-
tion.

1 12. The market research database of claim 11
2 wherein the current and previous information include brand
3 name codes and historical control designators for corre-
sponding brand name codes.

1 13. The market research database of claim 11
2 wherein the current and previous information include links
to other information.

1 14. The market research database of claim 13
2 wherein the other information includes brand name character-
istics.

1 15. The market research database of claim 13
2 wherein the other information includes business enterprise
information.

1 16. The market research database of claim 1
2 wherein the market aspect of products is package informa-
tion.

1 17. The market research database of claim 16
2 wherein the current and previous information include package
3 codes and historical control designators for corresponding
package codes.

1 18. The market research database of claim 16
2 wherein the current and previous information include links
to other information.

1 19. The market research database of claim 18
2 wherein the other information includes package characteris-
tics.

1 20. The market research database of claim 18
2 wherein the other information includes product definition
information.

1 21. The market research database of claim 18
2 wherein the other information includes naked product information.

1 22. The market research database of claim 1
2 wherein the market aspect of products is product definition information.

1 23. The market research database of claim 22
2 wherein the current and previous information include product
3 definition codes and historical control designators for
corresponding product definition codes.

1 24. The market research database of claim 22
2 wherein the current and previous information include links
to other information.

1 25. The market research database of claim 24
2 wherein the other information includes product characteristics.

1 26. The market research database of claim 24
2 wherein the other information includes naked product information.

1 27. The market research database of claim 24
wherein the other information includes package information.

1 28. The market research database of claim 24
2 wherein the other information includes industry code infor-
mation.

1 29. The market research database of claim 1
2 wherein the first historical control designator comprises a
single bit.

1 30. The market research database of claim 1
2 wherein the first historical control designator comprises
less than three bits.

1 31. A market research database comprising:
2 a layer of product information related to a market
3 aspect of a product, wherein the layer of product informa-
4 tion includes effective date information for the layer of
5 product information, an identification code for the layer of
6 product information, and a first control designator associ-
7 ated with the layer of product information; and,
8 other product information related to the market
9 aspect of the product, wherein the other product information

10 are in layers substantially exclusive of the layer of prod-
11 uct information, and wherein the other product information
12 include effective date information for the other product
13 information, identification codes for the other product
14 information, second control designators associated with the
15 other product information; and,

16 wherein the first control designator permits
17 access to the layer of product information substantially
exclusively of the other product information.

1 32. The market research database of claim 31
2 wherein the first control designator is unique so as to
permit direct access of the layer of product information.

1 33. The market research database of claim 31
2 wherein the first and second control designators are time
related.

1 34. The market research database of claim 33
2 wherein the first control designator is unique so as to
permit direct access of the layer of product information.

1 35. The market research database of claim 33
wherein the first historical control designator is zero.

1 36. A market research database comprising a
2 plurality of sets of product related information, wherein
3 each set of product related information includes a current
4 layer of product related information, wherein the current
5 layer of product related information is in current time,
6 wherein other product related information in each set of
7 product related information is previous in time to the
8 current layer of product related information, wherein the
9 product related information in each set of product related
10 information include (i) identification codes for correspond-
11 ing product related information, and (ii) control designa-
12 tors, and wherein a control designator for the current layer
13 of each of the plurality of sets of product related informa-
14 tion is arranged to permit direct access to the current
layer of product related information.

1 37. The market research database of claim 36
2 wherein the control designator for the current layer of each
3 of the plurality of sets of product related information is
4 unique with respect to the control designators for the other
product related information.

1 38. The market research database of claim 36
2 further comprising redefine dates in the current layer of
3 each of the plurality of sets of product related informa-
4 tion, wherein the redefine dates are dates on which their
5 corresponding current product related information came into
current effectiveness.

1 39. The market research database of claim 36
2 wherein the control designator for the current layer of each
3 of the plurality of sets of product related information is
zero.

1 40. The market research database of claim 36
2 wherein one set of the plurality of sets of product related
3 information is naked product information.

4 41. The market research database of claim 40
5 wherein the naked product information includes links to
6 another set of the plurality of sets of product related
information.

1 42. The market research database of claim 41
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes naked product characteristics.

1 43. The market research database of claim 41
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes brand name information.

1 44. The market research database of claim 36
2 wherein one set of the plurality of sets of product related
information is brand name information.

1 45. The market research database of claim 44
2 wherein the brand name information includes links to another
set of the plurality of sets of product related information.

1 46. The market research database of claim 45
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes brand name characteristics.

1 47. The market research database of claim 45
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
3 related information includes business enterprise informa-
tion.

1 48. The market research database of claim 36
2 wherein one set of the plurality of sets of product related
3 information is package information.

4 49. The market research database of claim 48
5 wherein the package information includes links to another
set of the plurality of sets of product related information.

1 50. The market research database of claim 49
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes package characteristics.

1 51. The market research database of claim 49
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes product definition information.

1 52. The market research database of claim 36
2 wherein one set of the plurality of sets of product related
3 information is product definition information.

4 53. The market research database of claim 52
5 wherein the product definition information includes links to
6 another set of the plurality of sets of product related
information.

1 54. The market research database of claim 53
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes product characteristics.

1 55. The market research database of claim 53
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes naked product information.

1 56. The market research database of claim 53
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes package information.

1 57. The market research database of claim 53
2 wherein the another set of the plurality of sets of product
related information includes industry code information.

1 58. The market research database of claim 36
2 wherein the control designator for the current layer com-
prises one bit.

1 59. The market research database of claim 36
2 wherein the control designator for the current layer com-
prises less than three bits.

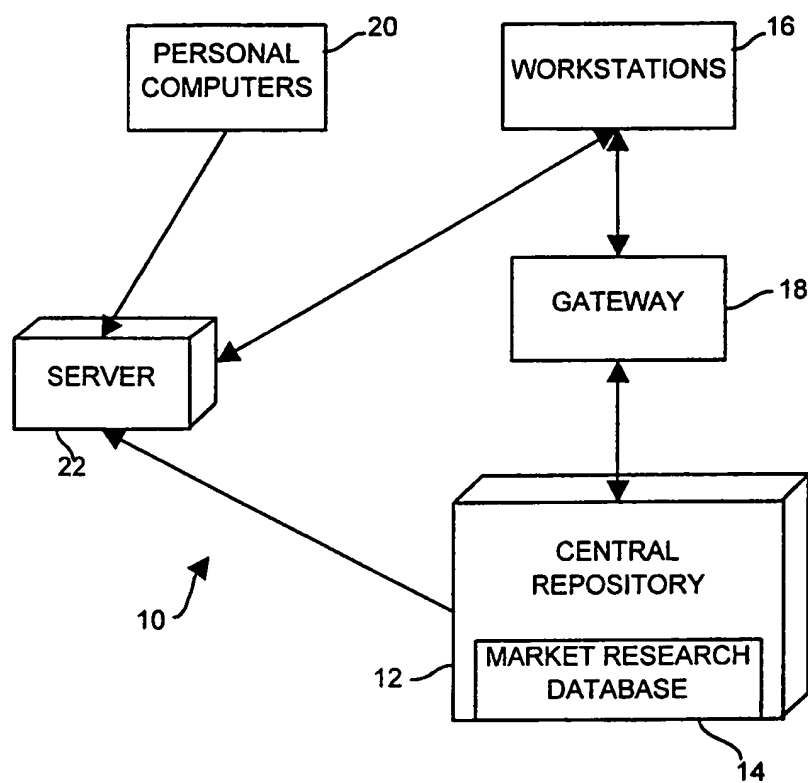


FIGURE 1

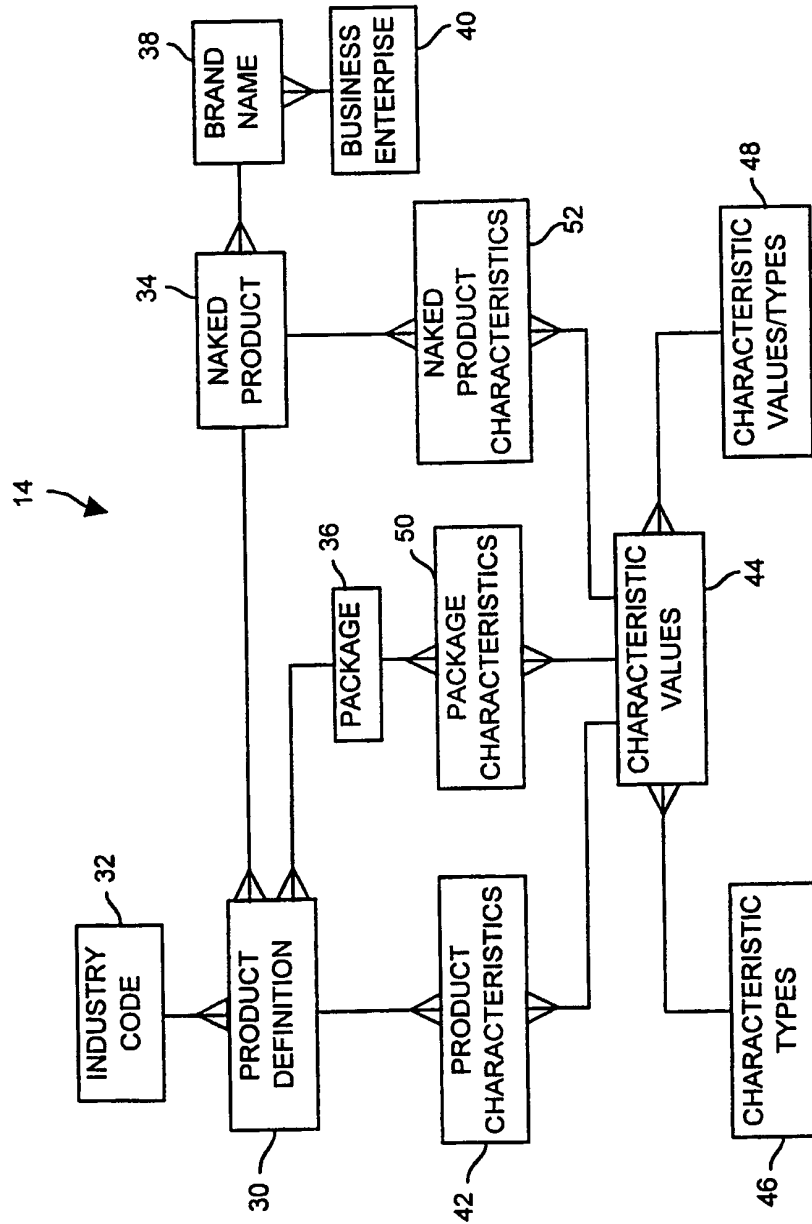


FIGURE 2

30

PRODUCT DEFINITION							
PRODUCT ID	HIST CTL	HIST CNT CTL	PROD NAME	PACKAGE ID	NAKED PRODUCT ID	INDUSTRY CODE (e.g., UPC)	EFC DT
↑ 60	↑ 62	↑ 64	↑ 66	↑ 68	↑ 70	↑ 72	↑ 74
							...


FIGURE 3

42

PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS				
PRODUCT ID	CHR TYP ID	CHR VL ID	HIST CTL	
↑ 80	↑ 82	↑ 84	↑ 86	...

FIGURE 4

36



PACKAGE DEFINITION																					
PACKAGE ID	↑	90	PACKAGE NAME	↑	92	HIST CTL	↑	94	HIST CNT CTL	↑	96	EFT DATE	↑	98	END DATE	↑	100	PACK. DISC.	↑	102	...

FIGURE 5

PACKAGE CHARACTERISTICS				
PACKAGE ID	↑ 110	CHR TYP ID	↑ 112	CHR VL ID
			↑ 114	HIST CTL
				↑ 116
				...

50

FIGURE 6

34

NAKED PRODUCT					
NAKED PRODUCT ID	HIST CTL	HIST CNT CTL	NAKED PRODUCT NAME	BRAND ID	EFC DATE
↑ 120	↑ 122	↑ 124	↑ 126	↑ 128	↑ 130
					...

FIGURE 7

52

NAKED PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS		
NAKED PRODUCT ID	CHR TYP ID	CHR VL ID
↑ 140	↑ 142	↑ 144
		...

FIGURE 8

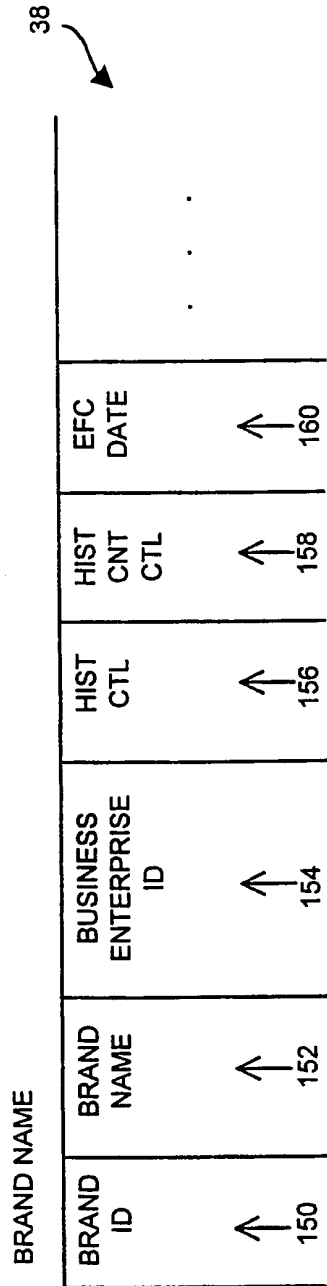


FIGURE 9

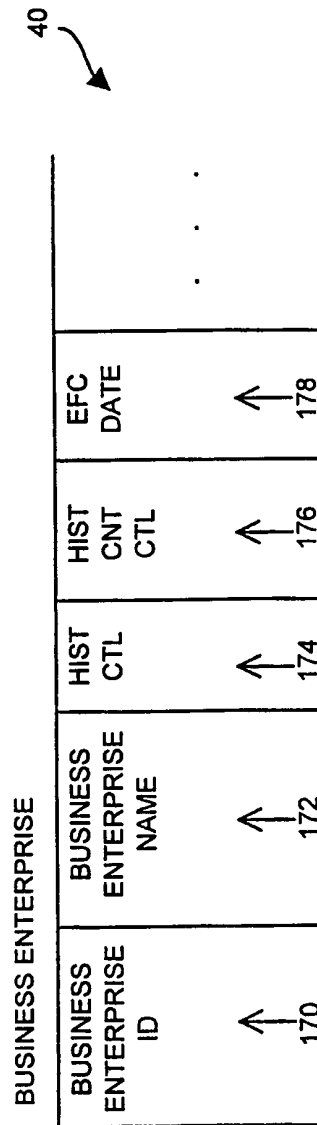


FIGURE 10

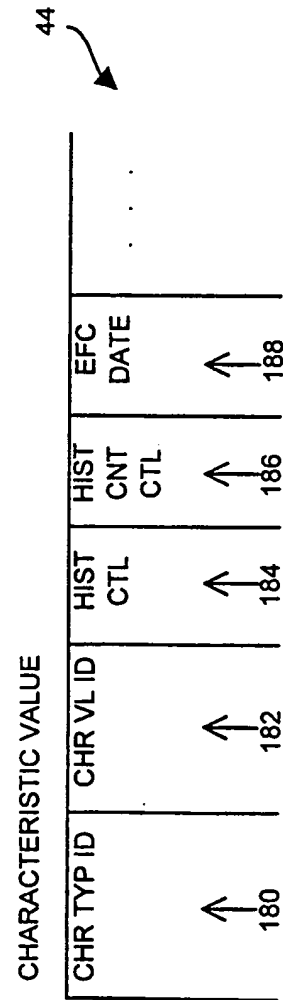


FIGURE 11

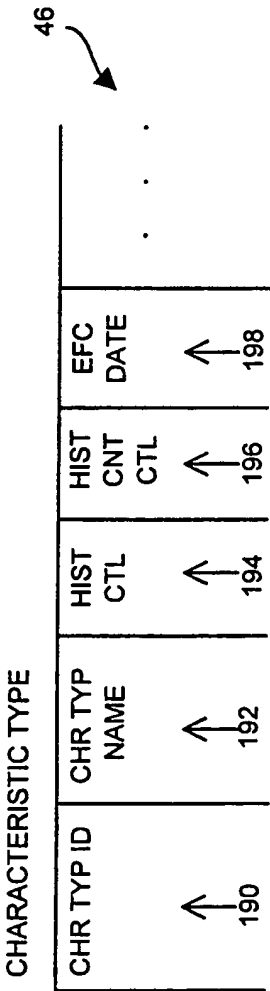


FIGURE 12

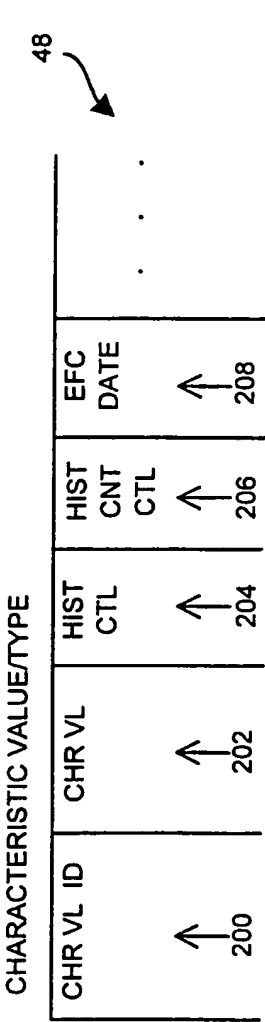


FIGURE 13

210

BRAND ID	BRAND NAME	HIST CTL	HIST CNT CTL	EFC DATE
1	ABC	0	1	1/1/97
1	A BC	1	0	1/1/96
1	ABC	2	0	1/1/95
2	DEF	0	1	4/1/97
↑ 212	↑ 214	↑ 216	↑ 218	↑ 220

FIGURE 14